

# Old-time radio's Tech Guide Vers. 3.2

## (Tech Guide 3 - Addendum #1 & 2)

by Bob Burnham

**Completely new  
section starts  
on page 14**

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Please note this contents list completely replaces the contents list which appears on Page 7 of the original book. This page has been modified since original publication of Addendum #1.

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## Addendum #1

### Introduction Revisited

*This addendum includes additional material intended as a companion the publication enclosed.*

**I**n the introduction to this book, I discuss in great detail the “why now” question, and my motivations in general and view of the old-time radio world as it stands. Today, at the “hobbyist” level, there is no money to be made that amounts to anything. I had, however, hoped that my latest venture would at least cover its own costs. As of this date, that hasn’t occurred. Yet... we press forward.

The original project came together rather quickly when my outlet for my regular radio columns was to be interrupted. To my knowledge, an issue of NARA News has not since been published (see “FLASH” update on page 23). Obviously, this leads me to wonder if there is a future for this publication at all.

Starting in the 1970s and continuing through the early 90s, I was very active not only as a vendor but in the writing and publishing end of old-time radio. Through the 1990s, I remained active primarily with writing regular columns.

In this book, the older articles I published were included in order to make some of those early words available to whatever body of people interested in old-time radio were still “around,” and present them to some newcomers for the first time. Some of those decisions were made at the last minute, purely for historical perspective. With only a few exceptions, I wasn’t interested in updating *ANYTHING* for that reason. I simply wanted to re-print selected material from the 1980s-90s to give a true sense of what the atmosphere was like. Also, don’t forget that my previous publications had been out of print for 10 years or more.

I’m not going to say that inclination was a mistake — it clearly wasn’t — but my perception of the usefulness of *SOME* of that information was probably misguided. I have

since decided that some of those old words truly were better left dead and buried, while maybe a few other words overlooked should be “brought back.” As an example, of that overlooked material, the most heavily visited area on brcradio.com is Ed Cole’s “History of FM Broadcasting.” It is presented here, along with some additional sections.

### Loss of our radio comrades...

We have seen many legendary radio broadcasters from the “golden” years pass, as well as several among us of the “collector” status. The title old-time radio *FAN* or *COLLECTOR*, or “*FRIEND TO BOB*” does not give that any one person any exemption from the natural progression of life.

**The biggest surprise to me was one person I was led to believe who *HAD* passed.** Although a letter had been returned “*UNCLAIMED*,” this person turned out to be *alive*. Still others truly *had* died and we had some genuine losses of a few *Friends of Radio*.

Ed Cole of Florida was mentioned in the first printing of this book. Ed was delighted that I was preparing this book and surprised but pleased that a new audience on the internet was interested in reading his articles (or “trash” in his words) that he had written. Ed saw his material that I presented on the BRC website, but never saw the printed version. He and I would have conversations that went on for hours about technical matters, recording techniques and the latest technology. We corresponded frequently until I stopped hearing from him suddenly in July 2001. I never heard from Ed again until I learned of his death in September. Since he had no immediate family members, I thought it especially important to point out his accomplishments and remember the impact he had on some of us. I am not by any means, trying to “profit” on a dead man’s work, but to appreciate and remember the knowledge he gave us, for which I had his “blessing” to use. Ed was a very humble man, but in a way, he was proud of what he wrote.

He was proud not from a personal ego or personal gain standpoint, but from the fact that others benefited from what he had written.

More recently, the old-time radio hobby also lost **Dave Warren**, of Cincinnati, Ohio. Dave was a good friend who did the artwork on some of my catalogs published in the late 1970s and '80s. The most "famous" cover he did for me was the portrait of Dick Powell as Richard Diamond which I published in 1979 (*see back cover*). Dave was best known for his "**Dave Warren Players**" presentations at conventions (*see page 22*). This was the first group of non-professionals to recreate radio drama. I helped him with sound and sound effects at some of those shows. He was also a long-time friend of **Bob Burchett**, also of Cincinnati, Ohio. Bob also did the artwork for an incredible number of Collector's Corner and Old-Time Radio Digest covers.

Finally, from a personal and professional standpoint (and also recently), my friend and mentor of 1979-80, **Jack Hood** of Grand Blanc, Michigan passed in March 2002. Twenty-three years ago, Jack named me Production Director of a radio station in Ann Arbor, Michigan and I haven't looked back since. Thanks to Jack accommodating my needs at the station, I was also able to attend my first Friends of Old-time Radio convention in 1979. That Christmas, he and I produced a 24-hour special that aired featuring many radio shows of the past. Jack and I had corresponded recently, and we were hoping to get a syndication project launched that he was to host. I was able to thank him for his mentoring in the early years and he *DID* see Tech Guide 3 in print. Although he didn't play a part in its content — his personal influence on me is reflected in my writing and my professional work and attitude.

#### **Flies...**

Unfortunately, there is always a fly in the ointment of any printed project of this magnitude (which from a professional publishing standpoint is actually quite a microscopic "magnitude"! ). Considering Tech Guide 3 was targeted to the tiny "*niche*" market

that I've written so much about, a snafu or two is to be expected (seeing as the number of words presented far exceed the number of eyes that will ever read them). **The "fly" is this case, is not even worth addressing.**

Suffice it to say, **if it appears that your copy of this book is missing some pages, it is because some of the material that was part of the first printing really has been deleted!** In its place, I am pleased to offer some additional sections. Anyone who requested the book after January 2002 is receiving this material free of charge.

I have learned a lot about my many radio friends past and present since **Tech Guide 3** was first printed during the Fall of 2001. I mailed out a few promotional copies of the original book. For the most part, those who were supportive a decade or two ago continue to be. Those who didn't care and/or completely ignored what I was doing the last time remain consistent in their apathy, and that's fine with me, too.

From all perspectives, to a degree, I'm saddened that the many predictions I have made in writing over the years seem to be coming true. Everything and anything is perceived to be of value and is peddled daily on **EBay** on the internet by both legitimate sellers as well as questionable individuals. Even if an item such as a *CD* of an old-time radio show is thought to have **NO** value, there is a good chance someone, somewhere will pay "*good money*" for it. Less tangible items such as business arrangements involving virtually anything imaginable including old-time radio — are also being pitched to investors, not necessarily on EBay but to perspective investors. Someone will probably "*bite*" on the pitch when the success statistics of books-on-tape/*CD* are thrown in their faces (Everyone is simply too busy to sit down and read a book. Rush rush rush).

On the subject of value, regardless of whether you or I think something is worthless, someone **MIGHT** give a buck for it and there are people who are licking their chops for that ***one buck***.

Hey, I wouldn't give you 50 cents for a Lone Ranger CD, but there's not only someone who'd give you a buck, they'd gladly *BID* up to 10 or 20 or **50** bucks for it — if they *really* wanted it. There's absolutely *NOTHING* wrong with this. Free enterprise is good for the economy. Wave the flag and all.

Yet, a couple of decades ago old-time radio was simply a fun hobby, *and nothing more*. It has since been devoured by the greed of individuals with their hands out for every dollar that can be squeezed out. Some people who I could once count among my friends "**back then**" now consider me an enemy because *MY WORK* and my *PERCEIVED* success was getting in the way of their **Corporate Greed**, or so they thought. This is sad. I suppose it's part of the reason why I rarely show up at any of the old-time radio conventions anymore.

Recently, my plan to attend one of those conventions as author of this book was shelved (no pun intended) simply because I was told there were no tables available to me! There were simply too many greedy people trying to squeeze nickels and pennies out of peddling their wares to a dying hobby. Today, there are more people selling stuff (legitimate or not) than those who are *TRULY* interested in buying it at a serious level. From what I'd been told about this convention I'd missed, my suspicions were proven true: There were more sellers than attendees, again, *at least from what I've been told*. If it weren't for the opportunity to visit with a few old friends, I would have to say the old-time radio

convention *truly has* outlived its usefulness to me, and apparently lots of other people as well.

Yet, despite all this dreariness, there *ARE* a few things we *CAN* do to maintain the status quo — or at least maintain our own personal recordings!

## Is it *really* the end of the Squealing Reel problem?

Six years ago, I wrote the following article about "*baking*" tapes, which were otherwise unplayable. There's a fly in *THAT* ointment as well. Since I wrote that article, the procedure described has been found to have some negative side effects. Notably, it causes the tape to shrink as well as increases the amount of distortion on the recording. There *ARE* high tech methods available to restore particularly valuable recordings *WITHOUT* baking the tape. Those methods, however, may be beyond the financial reach of the average person.

The "*baking*" method *DOES WORK*, however, expect to do it only *ONCE* when you copy it off to CD or another digital format. My original article is presented, with simply an advisory to use caution, but to do *SOMETHING* to avoid losing those shows for good. Aside from the physical breakdown, magnetic breakdown is also a major concern for old reels and cassettes. As the years pass by, those analog recordings may start to "*bleed*" either in the form of print-through or in the loss of clarity and increase in hiss. The process is very gradual, depending on storage conditions, types of tape, etc. The bottom line is the *SOONER* you convert those analog copies to digital, the cleaner those copies will be now and for future generations!

Bob Burnham

— April 23, 2002



## The End of the Squealing Reel Problem

*A procedure that old time radio fans anywhere can use to temporarily restore full playability to squealing reel-to-reel audio tapes and/or tapes that completely freeze on the machines*

By Bob Burnham

The folks at a major reel-to-reel blank tape manufacturer have recommended the use of a special convection oven to bake varieties of certain grades of tape whose binders dry out making them impossible to play without cleaning the machine every minute or two of operation.

Some old-time radio collectors have advocated the concept of spraying plain tap water on the tape. The "other" common method used by collectors is the continuous manual (read laborious!) application of head cleaner directly to the tape with cotton swabs. This must be done as the tape moves through the machine. Typically, this means one must sit at the machine every minute the tape is playing.

Not everyone has a convection or an industrial oven, and I don't feel the other methods that have been used by collectors (including myself) to be particularly healthy for the tape itself or the machine. Those methods are also a bit of a pain!

The "baking" of the tapes, however, also works with ANY household oven (*NOT microwave*) with a reasonable thermostatic control. Use an oven thermometer if you aren't certain your oven is dependable. They are available from any grocery store. Below are the steps involved that I recommend. This is not a "pure" science, so some deviation from these steps will probably also work. This is the method I have tested, however, and I can verify with reasonable certainty that if you follow these steps, it *WILL* work.

1.) If possible, first wind your reel onto a metal reel. I used an empty 10-1/2" aluminum take-up reel, but a 7" metal reel should work just as well. You may have to thread the tape directly from the supply reel to the take-up reel (by-passing the tape guides and heads) if the tape is *really* bad. Use a piece of masking tape to temporarily secure the tape guides to enable your machine to operate in this mode.

2.) Thoroughly pre-heat your oven to approximately 125 degrees. A few degrees either way should not make a difference. Then switch your oven to "**bake**." Imagine you're warming some left-overs or a bagel...*before* the days of microwave ovens.

3.) Place the reel on the center rack of the pre-heated oven. If you wound it onto the metal reel, it will of course, be wound tails out.

4.) Allow the reel to "bake" for about 30 minutes, of course, using adequate protection for your hands.

5.) Remove the reel from the oven. Allow it to "**cool**" about 15 minutes.

6.) Clean your tape heads and tape guides. Rewind the reel, threading in the usual manner to the start of the tape. You will find the tape passes across the tape guides just like a factory fresh tape!

7.) Play the tape. The tape should play perfectly all the way through.

8.) Make a copy of the tape onto new stock. This "**baking**" method *is only temporary*, however, it can be repeated if the squeal returns before you have time to make a copy.

**I make no warranty as to the suitability of these methods for your particular situation, tape or equipment.** Furthermore, if you melt your tape into a plastic blob, I will not be held responsible! If you take your time and follow these steps and the advice given, however, I have reasonable confidence that these techniques will work perfectly for you just as they did for me.

*The following articles were originally published in the early 1990s in Radio Forum Newsletter by BRC Productions and Ed Cole.*

## **A BRIEF HISTORY OF FM**

By Ed Cole

**Frequency modulation, which is the most popular form of mass radio communications now in use, actually was developed and demonstrated in 1933 by Edwin H. Armstrong.**

Within a decade, there was an impressive increase in its use. By the summer of 1940, there were roughly 50 FM stations on the air, all operating with limited hours, and on an experimental basis. FM became widely recognized as a static and noise-free communications medium, although both the transmitting and receiving equipment in use at that time was primitive by today's standards.

In 1941, the Federal Communications Commission authorized the first regular or non-experimental stations, and by 1945, most FM stations held regular licenses. Because of the war, there was very little FM development until about five years later. Immediately following the war, there was a rush for construction of new FM stations, probably because of the encouragement and support given the medium by the FCC. There was also fear among some broadcasters that the FCC might replace the AM service with all FM outlets.

Almost all of the FM stations in existence at the time were co-owned by AM operators, and simulcast the AM programming. When the FM's brought no additional revenue to their owners, the number of FM stations after 1950 took a downturn that lasted several years. Radio station revenues increased after the war, but the number of stations on the air increased much faster. This resulted in a marked decline in the average income per station. In the decade between 1950 and 1960, FM's situation remained about constant. People who listened to FM did so mainly because there were very few commer-

cials, and it was largely recognized as a distributor of educational, classical or better music programming.

On June 1, 1961, the FCC authorized FM broadcasters to begin stereo broadcasting. In anticipation of the event, when the authorization was granted, three stations commenced stereo broadcasting at midnight local time. SCA (sub-carrier authorization) was widely used, because it afforded the FM broadcaster the opportunity to supplement his income by offering services on his subcarrier that could not be heard without the use of special receivers. Subscribers to this service paid a leasing fee, and were provided commercial-free background music for their businesses. SCA is still an option open to FM broadcasters. In larger areas, many FM operations use a subcarrier for distribution of readings for the blind, and the receivers for this are federally-funded. SCA's are in popular use today for telemetry/data. Stations whose transmitters are away from the studio site can use telemetry transmitters to send back metering data so the operating parameters can be monitored.

In stations with SCA's, the main-to-subchannel crosstalk, or the other way around, was an issue that had to be addressed, and problems here really showed up. Keeping the old stereo generators aligned was a constant headache. Very little stereophonic programming material was available at this time, and stereo consoles and processing gear was in short supply. Many engineers of the old school cursed stereo because any defects in the stereo phasing stuck out like a sore thumb on FM monaural receivers. I once heard a 30 second period of silence on an FM station. Thinking they had gone off the air, I called the station, and they said no such event had occurred. It then came to me that I was listening on an FM portable monaural receiver, and during that time, a spot was on the air that was 180 degrees out of phase! This is why it is imperative that phase relationships be dealt with carefully.

The authorization of FM stereo did not work overnight magic to a medium that was suffering, but it had a far more profound effect than the advent of **AM** stereo. So much so that by the mid 1970's, FM had surpassed AM in terms of listenership. As FM equipment became more refined, it became even more popular as an entertainment medium. This period saw soaring sales of stereo radio receivers, as well as the popular personal portable stereos. It is not uncommon today to see a station that sold for \$40,000 in the mid 1960's to be worth well over \$1 million today.

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**www.brcradio.com presents...**

A look back at: Radio Forum Newsletter  
**A History of WLAK, Lakeland, Florida**  
Polk County's Pioneer Radio Station

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Ed Cole was a lifetime Florida resident, old-time radio hobbyist and broadcast engineer. This is the story of a radio station he grew up with, and eventually joined its staff.

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*In the mid 1930's, the country found itself in the throes of the Great Depression. Radio receivers were plentiful at the time, but the only local radio services that existed were in the larger areas.*

The first station in Florida was WDAE in Tampa that began operation on May 15, 1922, and also has the distinction of being among one of the first radio stations in the nation. WFLA in Tampa followed suit in 1924, as did WDBO from Orlando. WSUN in St. Petersburg began on November 1, 1927. On May 15, 1936, Radio Station WLAK became Polk County's pioneer radio voice when it began operation from Lakeland, Polk County's largest city. The station began operation on 1310 kilocycles (as it was called then), with 100 watts of power.

The first ever remote broadcast in the county was of local church services, which became a regular part of the station's Sunday programming. In the beginning, WLAK also sponsored such events as the American Legion's Drum and Bugle Corps dance, for which tickets for a couple cost 75 cents. At that time, a brand new eight-cylinder Pontiac cost only \$730!

On September 20, 1938, WLAK was sold for the first time, and increased its power to 250 watts. A few days later, the station became affiliated with the NBC Radio Network, the first network in the United States, formed by RCA. NBC affiliation continued well into the 1970's. One of the programs I remember listening to as a boy was NBC's "**Monitor**" which aired on the weekends during the 1960s. A popular host of the show back then was Gene Rayburn, and there were many others I can't remember. Mel Allen was a visible force in sports reporting, as was Bill Stern. **MONITOR** featured a regular line-up of programming, such as comedy skits done by Mike Nichols & Elaine May, Jonathan Winters, and many others. Music of the era was featured, and NBC provided **MONITOR** for many hours per day for its affiliates.

In 1939, the Tampa Tribune Company purchased stock in WLAK. On April 22, 1941, the station was sold for \$13,000, and was sold still again within a few months for \$23,000. It was in the fall of 1944, just before the end of World War II, that the first ratings survey was held in Polk County. It found that WLAK averaged 79.5% of the county's daytime listeners, and 82.5% of the county's nighttime listeners! By today's standards, these figures are staggering, but one must remember the scarcity of broadcast services at that time. About the only things there was to do was to go to the movies (which were very popular), go to a "**juke joint**" (as they were called then), or stay home and listen to radio. Since money was not plentiful at the time, radio listening was very popular among everyone. People tuned in reverently each day to hear their favorite soap operas, just as they now do with television. This was "**The Golden Age of Radio**" and it came into every home and hammock in America. It was also enjoyed worldwide through the facilities of the **Armed Forces Radio Service**.

Many programs were fed by the network at this time, but many also were provided stations on lacquer disks. Because the shows were so popular at the time, no one foresaw the value of

these disks to future generations, and after airing, they were destroyed by the tons! How we as old-time radio collectors would have loved to have been there for the handout! As it happened, these disks were also widely used for the distribution of national and/or regional radio spots, and many were 16 inches in diameter and played at the old 16-2/3 RPM speed.

In 1946, WLAK changed frequency to 1430 kilocycles and increased power to 1,000 watts. On February 15, 1954, WLAK again increased power to its present 5000 watts daytime and 1000 watts nighttime non-directional. Immediately prior to this, they had added all new RCA high fidelity equipment, from consoles to transmitter. As a teenager, I somehow managed to visit WLAK almost every Friday night. It was an event I looked forward to after the week of school. My parents bought groceries on Friday nights, and I visited WLAK for those couple hours. How or why the announcers put up with me, I do not know, but they all seemed glad to have me stop by and call. I really asked questions and tried to get to the bottom of everything, but I respected their jobs and tried to stay out of the way as much as possible. On several occasions, I remember getting permission to use the production room to record some of my favorite recordings of the time onto a large floor model Ampex, probably a 350 vintage. This was a full-track monaural unit that operated at 7-1/2 and 15 inches per second. It sounded wonderful! I was given a couple reels of recording tape out of the "dead spot" inventory, and I remember the announcer splicing them in a place or two. These were acetate tapes, and were notorious for breaking, especially on the high tension Ampexes. I taped a lot of Mitch Miller material. WLAK had virtually every album he ever made.

In those days, many local spots were read live by the announcer, but in the early 1960's, the station got a new multiple-track tape transport— now a real relic! It consisted of a tape about 13 inches in width, over which 100 tracks could be recorded. The erase, record, and

playback heads were manually moved across the width of the tape to select the proper track. The mechanism wound the length of tape from one roll to another. The tape speed was about 5-1/4 inches per second, and used small windows (where the oxide was removed from the tape), together with small lamps and photoelectric cells to determine the beginning and end of the tape for automatic rewind and cueing functions. All tracks were cued up side by side, ready for instant playback. Other methods, such as automatic recording of control tones or silent sensing amplifiers, could also control the functions.\* WLAK was a showplace station, and during the mid 1960's, had one of the largest record collections in the state, with about 19,000 records. I am told that only WRUF, the University of Florida station in Gainesville, had a larger library at that time. Radio studios were much larger then, and the building was enormous by today's standards.

Once as a boy of 14, I sent WLAK a *"certificate of appreciation"* for their programming efforts. Working with a very old Royal typewriter, I typed a letter to them and glued it to some poster paper. By today's standards, it looked like the devil, but I was most pleased to find it on the bulletin board when I returned the next Friday night! They had apparently appreciated the simplicity of a boy's efforts. I have in my files to this day a letter dated February 8, 1962, from Frank W. Nesbitt, then General Manager of WLAK, thanking me for the citation. It was written on Engraver's Opaque Parchment, 20 weight stationery. Leave it to a writer to notice such things! This letter will always be a dear possession of mine. Someone once said that "little things mean a lot," and I think they mean *the most*. The last paragraph of Mr. Nesbitt's letter to me said *"We also hope that your interest in broadcasting will continue, and that someday you may join the ranks of broadcasters."*

That became reality for me when I joined the staff of WSIR (Polk's *second* radio station) in June, 1966. In 1971, WLAK became WQPD, and



the format switched from popular easy listening (or "*Middle Of the Road*" as it was once called) to contemporary rock, or *CHR (Contemporary Hit Radio)*. In July, 1983, WQPD became WLKF and was sold to Root Communications, which operates WLKF in conjunction with WEZY-FM, formerly WVFM of Lakeland. WLKF continues to serve its public with concentrations on local news and community activities. The format is news/talk, which has proven popular. WLKF operates on 1430 kilohertz 24 hours daily.

\*NAB Engineering Handbook, Fifth Edition,  
McGraw-Hill, 1960.

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**OTR shows...** which ones are the good, the bad & the ugly (*or just because it was on radio doesn't mean it's worth saving*)

by Bob Burnham

#### **BOB'S SIDEBAR:**

*When I first stopped publishing Listening Guide Newsletter a couple years ago, I said I would be making regular appearances in Old Time Radio Digest and other publications. I am pleased to finally get a regular series of articles out and re-emerging in The Hobby. Thanks to everyone for hanging in there, supporting me along the way and throwing in an encouraging word. A voice in the hobby is use less if it doesn't have an outlet. Thanks also go to old friends like Bob Burchett at the Digest, Jay Hickerson of Hello Again and Robert Newman who does the club publication I can't remember the name of!*

#### **ONWARD!**

Years ago when I published the second edition of the Listening Guide to Classic Radio I attempted to provide some sort of analysis of basically just which shows are good to listen to. I used a panel of collectors to help. The end result didn't exactly make the points I wanted to make, and I would have done it differently if I were to

do it again but what it all boiled down to was yes, there were *LOTS* of great shows broadcast, but for every one *GREAT* show, there were probably 20 mediocre shows and maybe 50 really *BAD* shows.

As I have written in the past, it's all a very subjective thing. I've spent my entire adult life listening to, collecting and writing about old-time radio but I wasn't paying much attention to them when they were on or I hadn't arrived on the planet yet! The only nostalgia value a show may have for me is yeah, I remember trading for that show back in 1977... I wonder whatever happened to the *COLLECTOR I GOT IT FROM!*

My childhood memories were television-oriented - not radio - although I do remember at an early age being intrigued by radio. I remember getting my hands on an old 1950's tube set with no cabinet I had salvaged from the trash. I actually restored it, put it back into use, and build a cabinet and speaker system for it. That was before I even knew the programs existed.

So when someone tells me how *GREAT* they think a show like *THE LONE RANGER* is, part of the reason they *THINK* it's great may be because they remember it. I do consider the show to be a classic in its own right, but from a writing/plot standpoint, pretty mediocre, and I don't like listening to the Ranger, myself (especially when there's so many other shows out there I like). Actually, that's being polite, as far as my personal assessment of that particular show. But that doesn't mean someone else wouldn't like 'em.

There's another category of programs I put into a category of being *SO BAD*, they're *GOOD* (in a campy sense). Two examples of these kind of shows are that horrible serial, *THE PLANET MAN*. Another good one (in a bad sense) is *THE ROY ROGERS SHOW*. When the whole plot of one show surrounds and is named *Dale Bakes a Cake*, you know that one really has to be action-packed excitement. *SPEED GIBSON* also

falls into the category of *trashola*. Actually, most of the kids serials fall into this bad category to some extent.

There is another category of shows that maybe we could call worthless. They have little or no entertainment or nostalgic value to most people. Notice I said most. One example would be a show called *GUEST STAR*. Another would be *PINTO PETE*. There also were hundreds of regional, local or syndicated shows produced in the 1950s that were basically done to fill air time, or as public service fillers. This was also the beginning of the disk jockey playing pre-recorded music. Unless the host is someone famous, or there is other significance to the broadcast, I would say the show is probably best bulk erased and forgotten.

There are of course, collectors who are more or less *AUDIO PACK-RATS* and will save *EVERYTHING*. My opinion has been if it's not enjoyable for you or someone else to listen to, why save it?

I used to be an *AUDIO-PACK-RAT* myself, but now if someone offered me a full broadcast run of *JOE SMITH SHOW* from 1958 (a fictitious show and person!), which happened to be a 15 minute syndicated DJ show, I would decline.

There are some collectors who would say *EVERYTHING* needs to be preserved. Hogwash! For one thing, there's enough collectors out there that *SOMEONE* will likely hang on to a set of those tapes. And if there isn't, and nobody wants to listen to them and they are of no historical significance, why *SHOULD* they be preserved? Who cares whether *JOE SMITH THE DJ* is saved? While we're talking about DJs, there are literally thousands of modern DJs out there today who are equally as interesting than a worthless 1950s show. For that matter, there are collectors who trade tapes of modern DJs and modern airchecks. There are also collectors

who collect radio station jingles for that matter. There are companies that *sell* collections of the worlds greatest DJ audition tapes.

Frankly, a lot of this material is of greater interest than some lame time-filler show from the 1950s like *PINTO PETE*, *GUEST STAR* or **an equally trashy-series, *JERRY OF THE CIRCUS***.

Now maybe if I was 20-30 years older, and I *remembered* any of these shows, I might have a different opinion. But speaking from the perspective of someone who is in an age bracket that the majority of the citizens of the U.S. citizens are in, I don't think I'm too far out of line. Also, non-collector type people are far more critical of a show that a collector is who collects everything! I don't fall into either category myself, but I am in a good position to learn about the likes and dislikes of other people, as far as OTR is concerned.

In a future article, an update on the use of the computer to help enhance OTR is in order. More and more collectors are using computers with modems to communicate, send each other lists, or participate in lively discussions. Making a single local phone call on a computer can now connect you to InterNet and UseNet, a national network of thousands of computer users, and archives of everything *INCLUDING* old time radio shows! The larger services such as CompuServe, America Online or GEnie also have UseNet access. Also in the computer department, a certain OTR dealer also has a catalog on computer disk that not only lists thousands of shows, but plays back excerpts of the shows through the computer speaker... now you can hear a digital copy of the show and check the sound yourself *BEFORE* ordering! More on this new technology next time!

— Bob Burnham 1992

## **CBS RADIO MYSTERY THEATER - A look back at this "new-time" radio show**

By Ed Cole

The date was January 6, 1974 at 10:07 PM EST when listeners to the CBS Radio Network via their local CBS affiliate got their first taste of what was to become one of the most ambitious projects in modern audio history — the beginning of the *CBS Radio Mystery Theater*. Renown actor, E.G. Marshall was at the microphone along with Agnes Moorehead and the cast of the first show, *"The Old Ones Are Hard to Kill."* To the listener who had no advance notice of the series, the opening sounded remarkably like **"Inner Sanctum"** which was also produced by Himan Brown and hosted for much of its run by Raymond Edward Johnson. And why not? Himan Brown produced both series, and everyone remembers the famous creaking door used on Inner Sanctum. The opening words on the CBS Mystery Theater set the stage for the drama and suspense.

*"Come in. Welcome. I'm E.G. Marshall.  
Welcome to the sound of suspense...to the fear  
you can hear."*

This was usually followed by a reflection on some aspect of human life, often in the "what if" theme which sets the stage for the drama which was to follow. Himan Brown was certainly no newcomer to producing radio shows. He had in fact, in his 40 years in the business produced and directed such serials as Dick Tracy, Joyce Jordan M.D. as well as the famous Inner Sanctum series of mysteries. It is not surprising that through Brown's associations, he attracted some really top-notch talent to the Mystery Theater casts. To name them all would take pages, but to name just a few; Agnes Moorehead, Mercedes McCambridge, Larry Haines, Mandell Kramer, Santos Ortega, Bret Morrison ("the Shadow"), Ian Martin (who also wrote many of the scripts), Fred Gwynne, Tammy Grimes and so many others.

I think one of the reasons for the show's success is not only did it have top-notch talent but actors who were willing to try almost anything different. And this had to be the case when one stops to realize that not only did this show run more than nine years, but it did so 365 days a year, seven days a week. Regardless of ones constructive criticism of the shows, this sheer volume of work is to be commended.

It may be true that perhaps one-third of the scripts were horrible and not much could be done with them regardless of who the actors were, but the middle third were very good and highly entertaining works. Mystery Theater featured some outstanding adaptations of classics by Edgar Allen Poe, Shakespeare, etc. There was once an entire week of shows devoted to the works of Poe, most of which were excellent. If you're like me, you rarely get time to sit down with a book and read it through. Years ago I did read these Poe stories and I found the Mystery Theater's adaptation of them to be excellent. I still think about the night I heard Mercedes McCambridge in "Carmilla" (7/31/75) or the night I heard "Dracula," also with her (5/2/74). I had collected many versions of "Dracula" on video tape in later years, but the thrill of radio, of using your imagination, added a new dimension to the enjoyment of this Bram Stoker classic. Again, as usual, marvelously adapted by the Mystery Theater.

As for the last third of the MT scripts, they go in with the middle third. Most all of the shows were complete dramas of the one-hour length. There were, however, a few that were done in five parts. "The Legend of Alexander" starred Russell Horton and was presented on five consecutive nights beginning Monday, June 2, 1981. Mystery Theater opened its sixth season in January 1979 with a week of stories about Nefertiti, Queen of Egypt, starring Tammy Grimes in the title role. Another classic written by Victor Hugo that dealt with poverty and injustice in Paris was Les Miserables. Mystery

Theater presented that also in five parts beginning Monday, January 11, 1982. It starred Alexander Scourby. The Mystery Theater version of Les Miserables was similar to the Les Miserables produced in 1937 and starring Orson Welles. The Welles version, however, was in seven 30 minute parts while the Mystery Theater version was in five 60 minute parts.

As if CBS felt they didn't have enough at the outset of Mystery Theater in 1974 with their acting staff and excellent scripts, they also began by giving away such things as clock radios, etc. They were given to people who would send in a card with their name and address, and preferably comments about the new shows. This was in the form of a drawing, and probably several hundred prizes were awarded each week. Beginning August 4, 1975, someone won a seven day, six night all expense paid trip for four to Disney World. This went on every week for four weeks.

The talents of the actors and actresses on the Mystery Theater cannot be diminished by the fact that most earned only about \$100 per script. Like Hi Brown, they believed in what they were doing and they did it well. There were no demands for \$10,000 per script, or as we see it today in the movies, \$1 million per script by top-rated personalities. I believe that says something about the dedication of the staff of Mystery Theater toward what they were doing. One of the main problems with getting more audience for the shows was the fact that most stations aired the shows late at night. CBS fed the shows over its network lines at 10:07 PM EST, and that excluded a good percentage of the possible audience for this excellent series. But in retrospect, I doubt that anyone my age or older has ever driven down a highway at night on a trip without finding that marvelous companion, CBS Radio Mystery Theater, somewhere on the radio dial.

At the time of the 2,000th broadcast which was on Friday, June 29, 1979, there had been

1,035 first-run shows and 965 repeats. I'm sure none of us will ever forget this excellent contribution to radio history or the appreciation we feel toward all who brought it to us. Executive producer, Himan Brown has perhaps put it best in his comments during the last show, "Resident Killer," starring Mason Adams. The show aired on December 31, 1982.

*"These have been the happiest nine years of my 50-year career of creating radio drama. The response to all that we have been doing has been most joyous. The theater of the imagination once again became a vital part of all that radio is and can be. Unhappily, this broadcast marks the end of the CBS Radio Mystery Theater as part of the network's schedule. After 3,000 broadcasts, we hope we leave you with many fond memories. I want to say thank you to our listeners, to CBS, and the station you're listening to for the support and encouragement, and most of all, to the hundreds of talented writers, actors and technicians who helped stretch our imaginations. I hasten to assure you that, although this series draws its final curtain, radio drama lives. Until we meet again... and we will... thank you. Good night. Pleasant dreams." (Creaking door closes)*

- H. Edgar Cole  
Lakeland, Florida 1986



Ed Cole's  
high  
school  
photo...circa  
1960s

*The following is the original text from the book which had to be removed due to deletion of some other material.*

## 19. Epilogue

**T**he problem with doing a project such as this one is that with today's technology, it's hard to know when to stop! There are volumes and volumes of info addressed in the previous book that I've chosen at least for now, to save for another time. I again realize this doesn't read like any other book, but probably reads more like a magazine. That has occurred out of necessity rather than design.

There are also things I'd like to do that time doesn't allow for with certain deadlines approaching. Perhaps I'll do a supplemental booklet, perhaps a cross index, and maybe if I feel so inclined, try to figure out what shows people are listening to today — and why they **STILL** do that instead of or in addition to viewing the latest blockbuster (or classic) film feature on DVD in 5.1 or better surround sound on their big screen television.

I am thankful that my lifestyle today has allowed me the time to assemble this material...even if it did come together in sort of a hodge podge fashion, in three different offices in completely different locations.

I am most appreciative that you, the reader, made it this far. I hope you've obtained a glimmer of useful information, been



amused, perhaps even enlightened, annoyed or outraged. If so, it's a fairly safe bet we'll meet again.

Until then, I must stop and tend to the details that are necessary to complete the process of getting these words in your hands.

Thanks again for listening in. I've decided to stop now.

— Bob Burnham

October 10, 2001

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Left: Bob Burnham from high school yearbook at the school radio station...1974

## Addendum #2

The material presented from this page to the end is new as of Fall 2002.

A Technical Guide to Collecting Old-Time Radio Programs

Old-time radio's Tech Guide III / Supplement #2

### Poor SAPS and the DVD-A Format

**T**his second supplement to Tech Guide III has been prepared for release approximately one year after the original book. The previous supplement cleared up a few loose ends with that original publication. I discovered one of my old-time radio "friends" of the past no longer fit in that category. Perhaps with this follow-up, I'll make a few more enemies, but hopefully not.

As this follow-up is being prepared, the technology of DVD-A (audio only) format is being studied by yours truly...DVD-A basically allows either 4 times the storage of standard CDs or 4 times the quality.

Unfortunately, the hobby is full of poor saps who are stuffing CDs (and hard drives) full of shows recorded in MP3 format. MP3 collectors are the millennium's version of those who in the 1970s recorded shows on 8-track cartridges or 1-7/8" inches per second reel to reel. ***Let's wake up! MP3s are for poor college kids, people!*** Is it ***REALLY*** NECESSARY to jam a dozen shows on a ***SINGLE*** CD when the blank discs cost 50 cents a piece or less!?

If storage is ***REALLY*** an issue, affordable DVD-A audio technology is already here and affordable! A computer-based DVD recorder will set you back only about \$270 for a Pioneer model. By the time this is published, that price may have already dropped. Blank DVD-Rs can be found for about \$1 a piece, or at retail sources for \$3.00 a piece. When you realize what we used to pay for good quality blank reel to reel tape in the 1970s and '80s this is indeed, an ***INCREDIBLE*** bargain. So why are people so damn cheap in that they delight in the MP3 format on 10 cent CD-Rs? Perhaps because they like to download those

shows to their personal MP3 player (***hint: You can do the same thing with traditional "walkman" style CD players.***)

To make matters worse, they probably even downloaded those shows from a freebie website rather than obtain legitimate recordings through traditional sources. Who knows about the integrity of that website or their source of shows?

I suppose I shouldn't complain. We should appreciate the fact that there is even any interest in old-time radio AT ALL in this, the multi-media information age. Any interest — even if misguided — is better than no interest. Further discussion on DVD-A and related topics will be saved for another time.

### Rating the Shows

A more elaborate survey of shows was made in Old-time radio's Tech Guide II than what is presented here. Back in 1986, a panel of collectors was assembled and an attempt was made to grade shows based on statistics. A few comments on various shows were included. It was later realized that an overview that depended less on statistical averages and more on commentary would have been more useful. That is what we had in mind when we compiled the comments for this feature. Sorry it has taken 16 years to get around to it!

With any form of entertainment, we tend to remember the best and forget the lesser-grade productions. A video rental store can literally build a business on forgettable "B" movies — many of which may actually be moderately entertaining for the moment. Radio is no different. For every ***"best of the best"*** show, it's safe to say there were probably 10 or 20 or even 50 ***real clunkers.***

In part, this section is for those who are discovering for the first time the wealth of old shows that are “floating around.” This is an attempt to provide a *GENERAL* guide to a small sampling of the good and bad shows that are out there, somewhat in the spirit of what was attempted in Tech Guide II.

Most of the comments are generalized. Some shows offer more detail or commentary than others on an entirely random basis. There has not been an attempt to make this list comprehensive or meticulously researched or anything like that. Several other excellent publications and logs are available that already accomplish these things.

Remember this also is a highly subjective

area of discussion. Some of you may disagree vigorously with the comments. For the purpose of general listening enjoyment, this is only one reviewer's comments without taking many considerations of the “nostalgia” value into consideration, although some references are made about the “nostalgic value” of a show. While the reviewer did *NOT* grow up listening to shows like these on the radio, he *HAS* spent a good part of his adult life listening to recordings of the shows.

Also added is a simple grading system. These grades take several factors into consideration, but the bottom line (of course) is: **Is it a good show to listen to?**

### Gradings of shows on the text of the following pages

|             |                                                                                                       |
|-------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>A/A-</b> | <b>Required listening. “The best of the best.”</b>                                                    |
| <b>B+</b>   | <b>You’ll probably want to hear this show. It’s a classic.</b>                                        |
| <b>B</b>    | <b>Depending on your personal interest, this MAY be a must-hear (read the comments)</b>               |
| <b>B-</b>   | <b>Not bad, but don’t put it on your MUST HAVE list YET.</b><br>There are better shows to hear first. |
| <b>C+</b>   | <b>Just slightly above average</b>                                                                    |
| <b>C</b>    | <b>Average to mediocre as it were</b>                                                                 |
| <b>C-</b>   | <b>Just a trifle above being a lousy show</b>                                                         |
| <b>D+</b>   | <b>OK, it’s pretty lousy, but may have some redeeming qualities</b>                                   |
| <b>D</b>    | <b>Lousy. Probably not worth bothering with</b>                                                       |
| <b>E</b>    | <b>Definitely not worth bothering with</b>                                                            |

The following listings are more or less arranged in alphabetical order by series title. With only a few exceptions, most of the shows listed are the more popular genuine “old-time” shows, not the various shows that were produced in the 70s and 80s — some of which aired only regionally.

The text was written in random fragments in a stream of conscienceness mode. Because of this, the author himself may end up disagreeing with some of his own gradings at

some point. This does not mean the comments no longer apply. It merely further proves that any such evaluation is entirely subjective.

If you were associated with any of the shows that we didn’t like, please don’t take it personally! If the production of that show provided a source of income, was enjoyable to work on, enhanced your career or all of the above, that’s really all that matters.

### **SHOW LISTING TEXT**

**21st Precinct** is an early attempt to present a real-life police drama (They didn't really get it right until the 1950s when *Night Watch* was produced). 21st Precinct begins with the ringing of the phone and answered with the title of the show and the officer identifying himself. Sometimes to make for entertaining radio, it is better to present the ordinary as somewhat extraordinary. While there are some interesting cases, this show is just a little "too" dry for my tastes. C-

**Academy Award Theater** is a well executed dramatic series. If you like spine chillers or thigh-slappers this may not be the show for you, otherwise give it some consideration. B

**Adventures By Morse.** "If you like high adventure, come with me!" I always liked this series. This series is like *I Love a Mystery* before they broke it into eight zillion parts. B+

**Aldrich Family, The.** In some circles, it would be simply called Henry Aldrich. Ezra Stone plays Henry, the squeaky-voiced teenager in the family. You could probably call it a typical sit-com — perhaps equivalent to television's *Leave It to Beaver*. Henry and his pal, Homer get into all sorts of mischief while trying to do what's right, with lots of "gee whiz" cliches. On top of all this, the characters are well developed and scripts while surrounding simple plots, are good. It's a fun listen! B

**Amos 'n Andy.** If you can ignore the Afro-American stereotypical portrayal of the black culture, you'll find these guys and the many characters (even Kingfish) as lovable. B-

**Baby Snooks Show The.** If you're a fan of the work of Fannie Brice, this is the show for you. She made appearances on other shows.

This, however, is the one (and character) she was most famous for, which in general, is a spoiled obnoxious brat. Some of the plots are ridiculous, but it's a classic series. D+

**Black Museum The.** Orson Welles stars in this series that I wanted so much to like! The stories are built around simple objects that were the basis of some crime committed in the past that is dramatized. Some of the shows are interesting, but I felt the series overall was dreary. C-

**Boston Blackie...** "Enemy to those who make him an enemy, **friend** to those who have no friends..." It sounds pitiful, and the show could be considered formula ridden which it definitely is, and contrived which it also is, but somehow it *IS* a fun listen. Richard Kollmar plays Blackie who's always arguing with police officials and his girlfriend, but if you can tune out the incessant and most annoying organ theme you might get some enjoyment. C

**Box 13** I always considered this kind of a cheesy half-baked show with assembly-line written contrived scripts, formula and cliché-loaded and average acting. It's another fine show from Frederick W. Ziv syndication. D

**Bright Star (*The Irene Dunne Fred MacMurray Show*)** This show really wasn't anything special, and also from the folks at Ziv. It was a syndicated comedy series that I recall bringing into general circulation in the late 1970s, and listening to and improving the sound and thinking "isn't this a stupid show?" Yet it really wasn't all that bad, and today brings back nostalgic memories for me as an old-time radio collector over 20 years ago and those who agreed "isn't this show dumb? But let's collect 'em anyway, 'cause the sound is so nice!" But let's be reasonable, we're talking about whether the show is good to listen to. Based on that alone, I grade it a C+



**Burns & Allen.** It is hard to be seriously critical of one of the most famous husband and wife radio teams of all time. Gracie is the less-than-brilliant half who makes George the butt of all her jokes and causes more problems for George than he wishes. Yet as the mild mannered, cigar-smoking classy guy that he is, he comes out on top despite Gracie's blunders and manipulations. Anyone who was a lifelong friend of Jack Benny can't be all bad either. B

**Captain Midnight..** This is obviously a kids show. It's not too too bad as far as entertainment, but nothing to get excited about, unless perhaps you remember listening to it growing up. C-

**CBS Radio Mystery Theater.** This show has never been legitimately released in recorded form (probably never will), but bootleg copies are widely circulated. If you don't remember listening to it in the 1970s and '80s it's a series hosted originally by E.G. Marshall and produced by Himan Brown, the same dude who did *Inner Sanctum*. In general, it is more a melodrama than a hard-core mystery series, but they do delve into many facets of literature. In general, I found the series a little "talkie" and not a lot of action. But considering they produced a show that aired five days a week for several years, we can cut 'em some slack. There WERE some VERY good shows, but there were also some very dreary shows. In short, spotty as far as listening enjoyment. Also remember the sound quality varies greatly since those shows existing are merely home airchecks. C

**Chandu the Magician** There is more than one variation of this show, none of which I found particularly interesting. This show attempts to create a mystical atmosphere, and perhaps succeeds to a degree. But this

doesn't really do much to help the thin plots and assembly line production values. D

**Cisco Kid....** "*Oh Seeeeeeesko, the sheriff, he is getting CLOSER!*" Oh, could someone please SHOOT Pancho and get this annoying character off the show! The only thing more annoying than Pancho's constant giggling is the endless theme music and the hokey love scenes with Cisco and some shallow female character who appeared conveniently in the show. "The famous Robin Hood of the old west" is pretty much a dud, but I'll give them credit for having decent sound effects, but please shoot the organ player, guys. D

**Charlie McCarthy Show.** How could a ventriloquist make his "act" work on radio? Edgar Bergen did just that and very successfully. Great series. C+

**Columbia Workshop.** This was regarded as CBS' "experimental" series, thus the content ranges from drama to comedy to *docu-drama*, variety and music. Overall, it's an excellent production, but you need to sample the series in groups rather than as individual shows. Some collectors go to great pains to point out that the later series, CBS Radio Workshop, is NOT to be confused with Columbia Workshop. CBS Radio Workshop was primarily a drama/adventure series (without so much experimentation). B

**The Creaking Door...** Don't let this *South African* production be confused with *Inner Sanctum*. This is a different beast altogether...and not a bad one, per se, but pales in comparison to "the real thing." C-

**Crime Classics.** This show reminds me of *The Black Museum*. The basics of this series is to dramatize a famous crime with a somewhat creatively written script. It's not a bad show by any means, but if I were stranded on an desert island, this would NOT be the show I'd choose to take with me. C+

**Dimension X** These shows are well done, and the same series for all practical purposes — as *X Minus One*. This is science fiction, presented by exceptional authors and actors with some real RADIO acting experience. Well recommended! B+

**Dragnet.** Perhaps the most famous opening theme, this show was the creation of Jack Webb. This series translated nicely to television. It could probably be considered the first truly realistic cop show with characters that have long been parodied and imitated as recently as the 1980s Dan Ackroyd-Tom Hanks film. At least the original show had a serious intent. The plots, if not always exciting are usually at least entertaining — delivered in Webb's ultra-dry delivery. B

**Eddie Cantor Show The.** Eddie Cantor was a talented 1-man show, though he had a great supporting cast as well. This program showcases his talents along with that cast of regulars. This show is both a variety show as well as a sit-com. Great fun! B-

**Fat Man The.** There's the Australian version (of which there are plenty of episodes available) and the U.S. version, of which there are only a few. Personally, I prefer the shows that came from "down under" but your opinion may be different. The gimmick of the show is of course, it's about an overweight detective. If this reminds you of William Conrad's 1960s TV detective, "*Cannon*" forget it. Detective, Brad Runyon as The Fat Man (apparently) was much bigger man who even makes references to his weight throughout the script. The fact that Fat Man begins with a dialog of his being weighed on a pay scale gives you an idea of where the producers' mind was at. Yet despite the contrived opening, there are some interesting stories to be heard. C+

**FBI In Peace & War The.** Drama, thrills, action! A pretty good show for what it is. C+

**Fibber McGee & Molly.** The formula is familiar, the plots often contrived, but the characters developed and portrayed by Jim and Marion Jordan are brilliant. This is a great series and there are many many episodes available. B+

**Fort Laramie.** Raymond Burr stars in this good but not great show whose name conveys the setting of this series. The show sounds big budget, however, it apparently did not survive more than a season. Once you have the dozen or two shows that were produced, you have 'em all. C+

**Gangbusters.** The name implies what the show is all about. It's a cop show, somewhat contrived, but generally a well done and tightly scripted production. B-

**Great Gildersleeve.** Many "*spin-off*" shows aren't that great, but this one *IS* a well done series that started as a character on Fibber McGee & Molly. Harold Peary (and later Willard Waterman) does as great job with the "Gildy" character and the many characters and family members of Gildy's character are memorable. B

**Gunsmoke...** Regardless of whether you're a western fan or not (I'm not) this show is a masterpiece. Gunsmoke could well be considered dramatic radios finest series. The character development is very deep and complex, scripts, sound effects and music are second to none. A+

**Have Gun Will Travel.** This is probably a good example of one of John Dehner's better shows. It represents the same caliber of quality you'd expect from the CBS stock actors and crew. It's a notch or two below Gunsmoke but well worth a listen even if you're not that big of a western fan. B

**Hermit's Cave.** You may have heard an older person who remember this show tell you how "*frightening*" they remember the Hermit's Cave being. From a nostalgic standpoint, it's fun to hear what scared people in the 1930s and 1940s. This show is primarily a horror show — as opposed to fantasy — and depending on which version of the show you hear (and which host), the cackling introduction by the Hermit almost sounds humorous. Yet you **will** end up hearing a fairly well presented horror mystery from time to time. C-

**I Love a Mystery.** This is a beloved series, but is possibly overrated. In serialized form, this series is about the adventures of the A-1 Detective Agency staffed by Jack, Doc and Reggie. The scripts are from the creative mind of Carlton E. Morse, if that means something to you. The three characters are distinctly developed, and if you don't mind wading through 2 or 3 hours, you'll eventually hear how they solved the case. I always felt *Adventures By Morse* was in a sense, a **better** show than *I Love a Mystery*, although the central characters in *Adventures By Morse* didn't seem to have as much depth. C+

**Information Please.** I have a tendency to lump most game shows into the same category, with the exception of those with a particularly notable host (Groucho Marx is the most obvious example). These shows have their moments as nostalgia pieces and they're fun to listen to, but it's harder to get "lost" in one of these shows as you can a well produced drama. C

**Inner Sanctum Mysteries.** The host of this horror-fest tells bad puns, but laughs a little more realistically than "*the Hermit*" and at least from my listening vantage point, sounds a little more evil. Most of the shows are above average as far as scripts and sometimes superbly acted, if at times a little overly melodramatic. Raymond Edward

Johnson is the famous name we all associate with hosting duties, but a large percentage of the circulating shows are hosted by Paul McGrath who does a fine job in his own right and has the best evil laugh. C+

**Jack Benny.** Star of stage, screen and radio, there's no question that by listening to Jack's radio work you get a sample of some of his best moments. A master of timing, and his being surrounded by a '*gang*' of regular characters contributes to making this series an all-time favorite among serious as well as casual radio fans. A

**Let George Do It.** This show is probably a good one to listen to after you've exhausted all the available Johnny Dollar shows with Bob Bailey. While nowhere near as good as Johnny Dollar, it gives you a sample of Bailey's *PRE-Dollar* days. C+

**Lives of Harry Lime The.** As much as I wanted to like this show, being a fan of much of Orson Welles' work, I never could. More often than not, after hearing a Harry Lime show I would ask myself "*What was all that conversation about, anyway?*" Or "*Just what happened during the past 30 minutes this show was playing?*" Maybe it is a good show for some people, but I could never make much sense of it. C-

**Lone Ranger The.** Obviously, this is another one of the most famous shows and themes of all time. It is impossible to hear the *William Tell Overture* without thinking of the Lone Ranger. The big question in my mind is "**Is it a kid's show or simply a western adventure?**" If you answered "*BOTH*," you would be correct. There's a glut of these shows circulating, and it's not a bad show to listen to, if this is the type of show you are *REALLY* into. Otherwise, it's a mediocre, assembly-line written show. If it weren't for the legendary voices and other people working behind the scenes, it would be a waste of time. C-

**Lum 'n Abner.** This show is one of those acquired-taste type shows. Two old codgers run a store together and yak and yak about a host of characters who come and go. It sounds like it could be dull from this simpleton description, but the characters themselves have interesting moments. C

**Lux Radio Theater.** What can you say about the series that brought hundreds of motion picture productions to radio in a 1-hour capsule? I always thought this series sounded a little "stuffy," but they did justice to a lot of legendary films. Yet listen to a whole bunch of Lux shows and you may realize the famous *MOVIE* actors were *not ALWAYS* the best *RADIO* actors. B-

**Night Watch.** This is a pretty cool show that was way ahead of its time. It's basically a realistic cop show whose announcer points out "these are not actors. This is real. This is Night Watch." As result, some of the shows follow some pretty routine cases, but even those are sometimes fun to hear. The story that goes along with this is the producers of the show actually lugged around a heavy reel to reel recorder and battery box to gather the raw audio. B

**Misadventures of Si and Elmer The.** If you're not a collector of old shows, you won't know this series. Simply stated, it is primarily a Lum 'n Abner rip off. Entertaining? Marginally so. D+

**Mr. Firstnighter.** It's a rather hokey opening during which "Mr. Firstnighter" ushers you down the aisles of a theater on opening night of a new play, yet (for whatever reason) I like it anyway! It's the essence of how creative classic radio could be and some pretty reasonable scripts/productions shows came out of this series as well. B

**Mr. Keen Tracer of Lost Persons.** This mystery whodunnit sounds almost like a soap opera, except most soaps were a little better written than this show. "The kindly old investigator" and his ever-bumbling assistant Mike Clancy, take us through their various cases. Sometimes they are incredibly simple, sometimes teaching morales, but generally just incredibly bad, but unintentionally humorous. I give it a D+ for the campy content.

**Mysterious Traveler The.** For some reason, this is one of those shows that *EVERYONE* has sampled at least a couple episodes at one time or another. This is primarily a mystery series although occasionally ventures into the realms of horror and fantasy. There are some well done episodes and there as some mediocre shows. C+

**Nightbeat.** This show features Frank Lovejoy starring as Randy Stone, who plays the part of a newspaper reporter somehow always getting into sticky situations. Yet the scripting and acting are first rate. This is one of those shows that nobody really remembers, despite the fact that it *REALLY IS* "good stuff." B+

**Our Miss Brooks** The ever-patient Miss Brooks is played by of course, Eve Arden, along with the constantly flustered Gale Gordon as Mr. Conklin is a fun romp. I like the character development, which you can hear from listening to a number of shows. The plots are at times, on the silly side, but that can generally be forgiven. Some of the students also have ridiculous names (like Stretch Snodgrass) that simply add to the fun and frolic. B

**Planet Man The** This show was included only so it could be nominated for one of the worst shows radio ever produced. It's a campy, corny, dumb, Tom Corbett/Flash Gordon rip-off. Did I mention this was a dumb show? E

**Police Headquarters.** Repeat this phrase after me: "Most shows from the early to mid 1930s are mediocre at best." Police Headquarters is one of 'em. This show is a stiffly acted production that falls flat on its face. As Jack Webb proved with *Dragnet*, it IS possible to produce a real-life police show with a dry dead pan delivery -- and pull it off effectively. This one, however, is a snoozer. D+

**Quiet Please** is a show some people rave about. Is it a drama? Or is it a fantasy or horror show? Or maybe it's pure science fiction. It's probably all of the above. It IS a well respected show, and some of them ARE good, but I never considered it anything too special. I guess I just don't "get it." C+

**Richard Diamond Private Detective.** Dick Powell starts in this "pretty good" series featuring a singing and whistling detective. While the plots are predictable, Powell presents a likable character and this series is fun to listen to. B-

**Rogue's Gallery.** Before Dick Powell played Diamond, he did this series. The show has some silly "conscious-talking" segments, and scripts are a bit on the corny side, but it's worth hearing. C+

**Sam Spade, Detective The Adventures of..** The amazing Howard Duff portrays Spade in the radio show as the hard-boiled, often sarcastic detective. The scripts are brilliant, and even the Wildroot Creme Oil commercials, though campy, are great fun. B

**Sealed Book The.** This is basically a horror show with a somewhat elaborate but contrived opening. Some scripts sound

assembly-line written, but there's a few good ones here and there. C

**Shadow The..** The classic comic book thriller comes to radio...or that is, it *CAME* to radio. Lamont Cranston, "wealthy young man about town" leads a dual identity, just like Superman and Spiderman. This show is legendary. Some people prefer the earlier shows with Orson Welles in the title role. Others like Bill Johnstone or Brett Morrison. As far as listenability, if you can accept the gimmick and the Shadow voice filter and immerse yourself in the mystery, you'll have a good time. B

**Sherlock Holmes.** There are several different flavors of this series. Most collectors would agree that their FAVORITE was the run featuring Basil Rathbone and Nigel Bruce. If you're a Holmes fan, you'll want to sample them all, but for casual listening, Rathbone and Bruce is a good start. B

**Speed Gibson of the International Secret Police.** I can't believe I actually listened to this entire serial from beginning to end at one time. I must've been entertained, or really desperate for something to listen to. I think the latter was the case. The theme will especially get on your nerves. Overall, it doesn't get me excited from a listeners perspective, either. C-

**Strange Dr. Weird The.** Maurice Tarplin, the same guy who hosts *Mysterious Traveler*, is "*Dr. Weird*." The tough part of this series is it's only a 15 minute show, thus, the plots are rather shallow plus it seems half the time is taken up with commercials for Adam Hats. I always considered this show "so-so" but the opening and closing are creative. C-

**Superman.** The famous comic book came to radio and kids flocked to hear it. Same basic comments applied to *The Shadow*. Good stuff, if this is your genre, but the *Shadow* is still more interesting. C+

**Superman.** The famous comic book came to radio and kids flocked to hear it. Same basic comments applied to The Shadow. Good stuff, if this is your genre, but the Shadow is still more interesting. C+

**Suspense.** What can you say about radios outstanding theater of thrills that hasn't already been said? Although the broadcast run extends to 1962, the better shows can be mostly found during the 1940s and 1950s. Suspense is best sampled in multiple shows. It's like the old potato chip slogan: Betcha can't listen to just one! Not every show is a winner, and the shows of the early 60s vary. B+ average

**Tom Corbett, Space Cadet...** Yep, it's a kids show, but kind of a fun adventure anyway. The delivery style for Kelloooooooooooooogs Pep is great campy fun, too. C+

**Vic & Sade.** *"From the house halfway up the next block."* This series is dry humor at its finest. The scripts are frequently comprised of idle conversation between, (here's a surprise) Vic and Sade, their son, Rush, and others. It's not a spine tingler or a knee slapper, but it's an interesting series. C+

**Weird Circle, The.** This show falls into

the category of Syndicated Horror Junk. Almost everything about this series is weak, from the laughable water sound effects to the hokey reverb drenched opening narration. I know it's supposed to sound like they're in a cavern, but it's too corny for me. Listen for assembly-line writing, mediocre acting, and minimal sound effects (except for that damn running water!) and production values. Enjoy it — if you dare! I'll be generous and give it a D+

**X Minus One** See description for *Dimension X*.

**You Bet Your Life.** If it weren't for Groucho Marx' quit wit and one-liners sounding like they were completely off the top of his head — this show would be nothing more than another boring game show. But the one—the ONLY—Groucho makes this show worth a listen. C+

**Yours Truly, Johnny Dollar.** The fabulous free-lance insurance investigator is well-liked by old-radio fans and deservedly so! It is important to focus on the shows produced during the mid 1950s and later rather than the earlier episodes during which Bob Bailey portrayed Mr. Dollar. A- (Bob Bailey episodes) B+ (Mandell Kramer episodes) C (Charles Russell, Edmond O'Brien and other "odd" episodes)



**Left:** From 1987, some of the Dave Warren Players: Ron Lackmann, Dave Warren, Dave Zwengeler.

### Some parting words:

To say that this series of publications has had overwhelming response would be less than honest. Let it simply be known that with the release of this supplement, basically everything the author wanted to release is now out. The articles that were never published that were submitted to NARA News (prior to Jim Snyder's departure as editor) are now in print. The feelings both good and bad the author (that would be ME!) has had about the old-time radio collecting hobby have been expressed. Perhaps the goals aimed for in 1984 (that some thought were worthy of a Rockford Award) were not reached with these current publications, but the fact is most of those so-called goals are no longer applicable, anyway. As a writer of this "stuff" for his entire adult life, the author's PERSONAL goals, however, HAVE been reached at least as far as old-time radio is concerned.

Perhaps there are some technical areas that should really have further elaboration, but I'm hesitant to go much beyond what was discussed at the beginning of this supplement. As I've said many times, Old-time radio has become overrun with computer geeks with hard drives full of MP3 recordings who think they know it all, content to completely ignore

## Flash-o-gram!

### NARA News Lives!

DEARBORN HTS. MI, OCT.18, 2002 — Stop those infernal presses! Just as we were going to press, a copy of **North American Archives'** Fall 2002 journal arrived in our mail box. Thanks gang, and congratulations, Don Aston.

efforts such as this. They may even find laughable the traditional methods of an old-school guy like me rooted in the professional industry. If the body of serious old-time radio collectors no longer exists, or a sufficient audience no longer remains, there is no point in broadcasting to an empty planet. At the same time, if ever asked to do a column again, such an invitation would probably be accepted. There is more to be said if anyone is still out there and those that are think it's worth listening to.

To those of you who have been supportive, many thanks. To the rest of you who couldn't care less, we must've caught your attention anyway, if you've read this far!

Previously, I have thanked many people in the hobby and I would normally mention a few of these people again, but mostly I want to thank my family members and immediate friends in the broadcast industry itself. Many have "tolerated" my radio interests a long long time. They know who they are.

— Bob Burnham

September 21, 2002

# BRC OTR DISTRIBUTORS



Dick Powell as  
Richard Diamond

OLD TIME RADIO TAPE SALES

The cover of a catalog published August 1979. It features artwork of Dave Warren of Cincinnati, Ohio with help from Bob Burchett. *Thanks guys.*